Explaining Levitation
The Case of Joseph of Copertino

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If levitation is a fact of nature, we need to enlarge our worldview. A worldview is a vision of life that covers at least three areas: ontology, epistemology, and ethics.[i] I find myself at odds with mainstream ontology: mind I believe is fundamental, a creative factor in nature, not a futile epiphenomenon. I also think we need new theories to accommodate a spectrum of mostly repressed experiences that come under the rubric of paranormal and mystical. If these experiences are factually persistent, they have implications for worldview making.

Here I will focus on one dramatic case of psychokinesis (PK) as my point of departure: the levitations of Saint Joseph of Copertino (1603-1663). In the Roman Catholic tradition,[ii] records exist of roughly one hundred and fifty levitating saints; Joseph, however, was the superstar of attested levitators. My aim is to lay out a concise summary of the evidence for his levitations. Then I want to discuss some points of approach for explaining these admittedly rare phenomena.

Saint Joseph's levitations are known to the English-speaking world mainly through Eric Dingwall's[iii] discussion and citations from Herbert Thurston.[iv] In English translation, one may consult Pastrovicchi's biography,[v] much of which is based on Bernini's *Vita*. One thing quickly struck me in my research: Joseph was much the product of his Southern Italian, Counter-Reformation Catholic culture, even though he was a both an original and universal in his mystical spirit.

Levitation forms part of a diverse family of PK phenomena. The family includes some curious members: poltergeists, stigmata, telekinetic events at the moment of death, supernormal healings, materializations of the sort Eva C. made famous, apparitions (if Braude's[vi] analysis of the PK element in them is correct), placebo effects, and all sorts of experimental studies in which agents mentally influence physical systems -- for example, Rhine's dice-throwing experiments[vii]. Moreover, it follows that ordinary, everyday acts (not reflexes) that we perform and think of as free,[viii] normal but infrequent phenomena like blushing, and the whole field of psychosomatic medicine are brought into the PK fold. For all involve unmediated influence of thoughts, feelings, images, or intentions on bodily states. So there is nothing inherently freakish about the idea of levitation; it is a rare manifestation of something more widely reported in less conspicuous, less shocking forms. But now let's examine a specific case history.

Evidence for Joseph's Levitations

Documentation – The evidence is historical and consists of written narratives. The core documents depose eyewitness testimony given under oath. About two hundred cases have been collected; in light of what we know, we may infer that the people who actually observed Joseph levitate numbered in the thousands, for Joseph was a public figure for thirty-five years, and his levitations, spontaneous and unpredictable, occurred

throughout that period. Original records of sightings exist in letters, diaries, biographies; they are inscribed on relics, monuments, official documents, which are located in the many churches and convents of Italy where Joseph lived or visited; in addition, in the Vatican Archives, we find numerous *riti*, compendia, and 13 volumes of *processi* covering all aspects of his life. Finally, we may inspect paintings, etchings, and other representations of famous flights, e.g., an occasion when Joseph was gazing at the House of Loreto from a distance and ecstatically flew to the top of an olive tree, hovering there like a bird on a branch.

Gustavo Parisciani provides the massively useful, critical resources for the evidence of Joseph's levitations and other paranormal phenomena. Parisciani published a one thousand eighty page book, *St. Joseph of Copertino: In Light of the Newest Documentation (1963),* Osimo, Ancona) and other, related books on all aspects of the saint's life -- e.g. his trials with the Inquisition, his impact on the history of Poland, and so on. In important statements of fact, he typically provides testimony from one to five or six witnesses. Also, Bernini's biography of Joseph is useful for its frequent eyewitness citations. Recently, the first English translation and abridgement of this text has been made, and will soon be available.[ix] Bernini is emphatic: Joseph's story would be *incredible*, were it not for the copious eyewitness testimony.

Where – Witnesses who attested to Joseph's paranormalities were from all parts of Italy (tiny towns and famous cities) and also from Germany, France, Poland, Bohemia, and Spain. By the time Joseph died, his reputation had spread to most of Italy and often drew pilgrims from other European countries. There was a huge spike of 'miracle' claims after his death when people came from all over to his witness his body on display in Osimo. In ages of faith, a saint's shrine often became the scene of alleged healings and other paranormal effects.

When – Except for possibly a few years of slackening but not ceasing, for the last thirty-five years of his life (1628-1663), Joseph pretty steadily experienced levitations. It was not a rare phenomenon for him. They began after he was ordained a priest in 1628, and apparently *increased* as time went on until they occurred daily and sometimes several times daily. The records show no sign of "decline effect" in the display of his aerial talents. Diminished vitality and even being near death had no effect on the 'force' causing the flights. After Joseph got into trouble with the Inquisition, thanks to his levitations, he prayed for them to stop completely, and begged his brethren to pray for the same. They had only temporary success delaying the onset of his ecstatic seizures. The liturgical calendar was one element of timing that did influence his levitations. Holidays like Good Friday, Easter, Christmas, the images and the meanings, deeply affected the form and intensity of his levitations, as Parisciani shows at length in Chapter 15 of his big book. The passage of clock time never impaired Joseph's capacity for levitation; but the form and emotional tone was influenced by the symbolism of liturgical time.

Who -- All kinds of people witnessed and deposed testimony certifying Joseph's levitations: foreigners, ordinary illiterates, theologians, clerics, artists, pilgrims, doctors, surgeons, dukes, princesses, kings, popes, cardinals, and a raft of lynx-eyed Inquisitors from Rome and Naples. All souls were not soothed by the phenomena; some felt "sacred fear" and ran away, some like a German Lutheran Duke were thrown into violent doubt about their beliefs, and others were suspicious of uncanny, perhaps devil-tainted powers being in play. One of Joseph's awestruck superiors decided to use him to edify the public

and dragged the obedient but reluctant monk on a tour with him around the province of Lecce, visiting about fifty different convents. The trip took about a year. As it turned out, Joseph performed very well on this spiritual road show, so well that the Inquisitors took notice and made his life miserable by calling him to Naples for questioning. He was forced to defend himself against the charge of "ostentatious sanctity" and was accused of "exploiting the credulity" of the masses. In the end, he was acquitted of all charges, but an undercurrent of fear and suspicion shadowed Joseph for the rest of his life. The point: There was never any suspicion about the reality of his phenomena; the grumbling was from concern over the origins of his powers and the purity of his motives.

What -- What specifically did witnesses see and find so *evident*? First, we should underscore the simple conditions under which good eyewitness testimony for levitation may be obtained. Normal vision and ordinary language skills are all that is necessary to depose adequate evidence that so and so was raised from the ground. This differs sharply from claims about healing miracles or extrasensory perception where doubts and questions of interpretation come up more readily.

Joseph was often observed levitating while hearing or serving Mass. During the elevation of the host he would stop, freeze, and hover in space, his toes lightly touching the ground or lifting up gently, perhaps a palm's length. In other sightings, he would move up and down inches or feet above ground fairly rapidly; these anomalous movements almost invariably were preceded by a shrill, explosive scream. He would fly forward toward a platform and freeze, and then fly backwards, which he later explained signified feelings of humiliation or self-reproach. Other times witnesses observed movements through the air that performed actions: e.g. – install a large heavy cross in the ground that several men were struggling to move -- fly over the heads of a Spanish Ambassador, his wife and her retinue, in order to avoid talking to the Ambassador's wife -- soar eighteen feet in the air to contemplate Cimabue's painting of the Madonna -- carry another man up into the air and heal him of a long-standing mental disorder – and so on and so forth.

As to the speed of the *moti*, again we find a wide range from the hoverings observed during Mass to cases of speedy transfer that struck some witnesses as instantaneous.

As for the temporal duration of the flights, sometimes he would alight somewhere for a few seconds, or remain aloft for minutes; quarter and half hours are often cited in the *processi*; and there are reports that Joseph spent hours lost to the world and suspended in space. But references to very prolonged elevations are sketchy, and I don't attach much weight to them; also, in a few cases that I recall, it's not clear if ecstasy or levitation is being described. Hours of ecstasy are more credible than hours of levitation.

It matters little whether we speak of levitations that last one or fifteen minutes or half an hour or more. More important is that these are periods of time in the air that cannot be dismissed as based on quick impressions that might induce illusions. It's harder to discount a claim about something that lasted in broad daylight for minutes or much longer than a claim about something that flickers briefly before your eyes, perhaps in shadowy or emotionally-charged circumstances. As to how high the friar flew, we read reports of him floating to the ceiling of his cell and to the top of olive trees and high up to embrace Cimabue's Madonna on the wall of the Assisi basilica.

Circumstances and phenomenology -- The circumstances of Joseph's levitations were unpredictable, uncontrollable, and quite varied: Joseph never levitated in a normal state of consciousness; he was always ecstatic. The immediate trigger of the ecstatic state was always something he associated with the sacred. I mentioned the Mass and its high moments. Almost anything could set into motion the ecstatic process. Consider a few recorded specifics: the sight of a painting of the Madonna, a tangible relic of a saint (especially Francis, Anthony, Catherine), a few notes of Palestrina, the peal of a bagpipe, the daily chants and litanies of the quire, the sight of a Christ child doll, of a sculpture of the Immaculate Conception, of a leaf, the mere utterance of the word *paradise*, sheer good spirits and playfulness with his companions. And so on.

Joseph's levitations were omni-directional. He levitated up and down, forward and backward. He often landed on his knees in ecstasy, and from his knees rose rapturously into the air. In the midst of an ecstatic state, Joseph would often freeze like a statue; other times he would scream and beat his feet rapidly on the ground; using his arms and legs, he would shape his body into a cross. Mostly the levitations were involuntary, which at most he could delay or divert. But in the long run, the effort to quell them was a complete failure. In Joseph's experience, the effect of gravity was diminished *and* intensified; the power was bipolar and could weigh him down, indeed slam and press him helplessly flat on the ground as well as cause him to soar aloft. In these states, bystanders would poke, jab, and try to wake him, to no avail; yet he could selectively listen and come back if called under holy obedience. On three recorded occasions, he embraced and took up somebody else with him.

It appears from the frequency and variety of circumstances that Joseph was disposed by some internal need to 'explode' (his term) into ecstatic states as often as circumstances allowed. From 1645 to 1647, don Arcanglo Rosmi, his diarist, recorded about seventy cases of ecstatic levitation, and then chose to stop counting. In most cases, he reasoned, seventy observations of something should be decisive. By 1645 he was becoming ecstatic several times during the same Mass. During his last six years in Osimo he would levitate daily if not many times daily, according to Parisciani.

Three examples – Some concrete examples of these levitations will help. The first is highly specific about where Joseph *flew* to; there can be no doubt about what is being claimed. This and the following two quotes are from Chapter 22 of Bernini's *Vita* of Joseph: "Fr. Antonio Chiarello, while walking with Padre Giuseppe through the orchard of the convent, at a certain point gazed up into the heavens. 'Padre Giuseppe, what a beautiful sky God has made!' These words seemed like an invitation for Padre Giuseppe to fly up into the sky, and so he did, letting out a loud cry and bounding from the ground to fly up to the top of an olive tree where he landed on his knees on a branch that kept shaking. One reads in the *processi* that it was as though a bird were perched on a branch. Padre Giuseppe stayed up there about a half an hour and finally came back to himself, asking the priest how to get down from the tree. The priest had to get a ladder and in that way he descended from the olive tree." There are several narratives of Joseph coming to himself after having levitated to some high place he was unable to descend from.

Esthetic sensations like church music or the sound of violins carried Joseph aloft. One Christmas he invited some shepherds to bring their pipes and trumpets inside the church. At church he began to sing and dance until the excitement grew. The shepherds later deposed (under oath of course) what they observed: "Padre Giuseppe was so

delighted that he began to dance in the center of the nave and, at the sound of the pipes, suddenly sighed and loudly screamed and flew up in the air like a bird, halfway to the ceiling, *where he continued dancing above the main altar*, and went to embrace the tabernacle that was a considerable distance above the main altar. This was all the more marvelous because the altar was filled with flaming candles and he rested between the candles without knocking over even one. He stayed that way with his knees above the altar, embracing the tabernacle with both arms, for about fifteen minutes and then returned to himself without having done any damage whatsoever. His eyes were full of tears and he said, 'Praise God, brothers.' We all remained in awe; I said to myself, 'This is truly a miracle.'"

We have time for one more example. Walking in the company of two brothers, Joseph noticed three crosses approaching in a procession; he turned and posed a question to his comrades. He wanted to know where they would touch or kiss the body of the crucified Christ. The two brothers replied. "Then Padre Giuseppe began to respond, as the two brothers say in the *processi*: 'I…I…and I' swelling up more and more as though he could not say another word, but instead let out a great scream and all of a sudden flew from the brothers all the way to the cross, embraced it, and landed on his knees supported by the cross-beam about three metres from the ground. At the sound of the scream even the brothers of the convent, along with the two priests traveling with Giuseppe, stopped to contemplate and admire him in his ecstasy for a good long while with tears in their eyes.

"As sunset was approaching, the Superior arrived at Calvary and ascended toward the Cross and stood on tiptoes, stretching out his hand to touch the hem of Padre Giuseppe's tunic and to command him, by virtue of holy obedience, to return to himself. Then Padre Giuseppe, as though he had awakened from deep sleep, recognized the danger he was in and began to cry. He turned toward the cross and embraced it, gradually making his way on the ground and looking a bit stupefied. The other brothers pulled down the hoods of their robes and went away."

Since this scene describes an outdoor procession, there had to be other witnesses. Luckily, we have written testimony of the two friars with him on the occasion. These will have to stand in for a large collection of data. The public ecstasies and levitations caused everything around Joseph to stop and be thrown into confusion. So the Church issued increasingly draconian orders to a) move him from convent to convent as soon as the crowds got out of hand, and b) prevent the public and almost anybody from communicating with him, in person or by letter.

The reports concerning Joseph's phenomena were carefully scrutinized by the Devil's Advocate -- Prosper Lambertini, later Pope Benedict XIV -- during Joseph's official beatification process (24, February, 1753). With the documents before him, Lambertini[x] vouched for Joseph's levitations, deferring to the "unimpeachable witnesses."

Aside from a priori denial that levitation is possible, what are the plausible objections to the evidence outlined here? The problem for the objector is the massiveness of the evidence: the continuous duration of thirty-five years, the occurrence in so many places, the quality and number of witnesses, and the nature of the circumstances (broad daylight, suddenly, multiple witnesses). And finally the historically provable impact of Joseph's career is consistent with all the claims of supernormal power, but not with

anything else. What else could have caused the Holy Office to keep moving him around from convent to convent, isolating and hiding him from the public? If he had done anything morally or doctrinally suspect, twice the Inquisition wouldn't have acquitted him.

I'm not sure what can be said to explain away all this testimony. Still, some might insist there was nothing to these claims but:

1) Fraud engineered by the Church; which, after all, was in the midst of a Counter-Reformation and used Joseph as an instrument of propaganda. Wasn't the Pope gleeful when Joseph wowed the Lutheran Duke of Brunswick and converted him to the Catholic faith? And so on. Actually, it's ludicrous to imagine the Church would consciously manufacture a monstrous myth about a levitating saint, using what would have to be a clumsy simpleton to exploit some political advantage. For this to work, we would have to presuppose an enormous web of super-clever imposters and a super-stupid, credulous flock to make it work and go unexposed for four centuries. The fatal flaw of this view is that not one shred of evidence exists to support it.[xi] All the evidence in fact shows that far from using Joseph politically or trying to beef up a myth of his super-saintliness, the Church constantly cut him down to size and sought to make him completely invisible, forcing him to spend the last six years of his life in virtual solitary confinement.

2) It is well known from experiments like the famous one about the gorilla on the basketball court that eyewitness testimony can be flawed and defective.[xii] I'm an example to prove this; I didn't see the gorilla I was not supposed to see in this experiment. I was successfully tricked into *not* seeing the gorilla. But suppose I met a gorilla in my backyard; I have no doubt I would see it. The experiment illustrates a technique of stage magic called misdirection; but Joseph's levitations were not staged to deceive and mislead the attention of witnesses, as the Harvard experiment was. What the gorilla experiment proves to me is how easily people can be indoctrinated into not noticing things that *are* there. Some people, for example, convinced of the impossibility of levitation might not "see" the evidence, even if it were piled up in heaps before them. As far as I can see, the gorilla experiment and what it's presumed to imply says nothing that takes away from the over-all weight of thirty-five years of accumulated reports and observations.

3) We are not being suspicious enough. Perhaps Joseph was a closet hypnotist who cunningly caused thousands of people to hallucinate that he was levitating for about thirty-five years. The trouble with an idea like this is that it was part of Joseph's nature to be obedient to lengths of zenlike absurdity, and because any attempt on his part to deceive the flock would promptly have been noticed and stopped, with unfortunate results for him. Joseph had the temperament of a hermit and no taste at all for power or fame. The fact is that his "power" to levitate made much of his life miserable.

4) Some might automatically dismiss these claims about Joseph because they are *too old*. More broadly, there is much suspicion among academics these days concerning the uses of historical knowledge. There are good reasons to be on guard against deception; but you have to take things case by case. In my view, the historical case for Joseph's levitation is as strong as one could hope for in dealing with such a rare phenomenon as levitation. If evidence is good, it remains good no matter how old it gets; facts are timeless entities. If we threw out the evidence for a case as strong as that of

Joseph's levitations, we'd have to throw out a good part of history. While many historical claims are in doubt because of scant, weak, and insufficient evidence, the story of Joseph's levitations provides an abundance of documentation whose cumulative impact is very difficult to evade. Braude, in his discussion of this evidence, wrote: "No doubt many will be tempted to dismiss the evidence for Joseph's levitations as nothing more than the ravings of religious fanatics. But this would be an inexcusably glib response to a remarkable body of material."[xiii]

The Importance of Levitation

Why are these phenomena important? Apart from sheer entertainment value, a strong case for levitation has implications for philosophy, science, and religion. Philosophy is concerned with the problem of mind and matter, involving us in questions about the nature of the self, of human personality, and of questions of ontology. If an unusual mental state resulted in the suspension of gravity, it would invert the mainstream view of mind as a mere epiphenomenon of the brain. Psychoanalyst Jule Eisenbud wrote the following: "The levitations of Saint Joseph, striking mysteriously at the root of man's nature in a way that even the discoveries of Darwin, Freud, and psychical research have failed to do, have been put into a permanent stall."[xiv]

Science stands to gain from an encounter with Joseph and his levitations. Some physicists today are critical of classical physics because it omitted mind and consciousness from its general account of nature, leading to an impoverished worldview that Whitehead exposed as disenchanting and deanimated.[xv] According to these critics, the turning point for the re-introduction of mind into cosmology was the rise of quantum mechanics in the 1920s. Physicists from Pauli to Stapp, Carr, Atmanspacher, and others, call for new theories that give mind its due in the wider scheme of nature. One test for such a new theory would be how it dealt with the paranormal and the mystical dimension of mental life.

If there are implications for philosophy and science, levitation also speaks to the conceptual undergirding of scholarly religious studies. This domain of study, like many intellectual fields today, tends to be overshadowed by materialist assumptions. There is, unless I'm deluded, a noticeable bias against the *transcendent*: a kind of cautious, superior recoil from anything smelling of the "miraculous" or the "supernatural". But suppose there indeed were good evidence for a thing like levitation. If, as I believe there is, it would transform the conversation about the "miraculous" and the "supernatural" elements in culture. It might temper the extremes of scientific reductionism and religious dogmatism.

Approaches to Explanation

If we assume for the sake of discussion that there is evidence for levitation, are there any footholds for moving toward theory and explanation? We can begin on solid ground: Joseph's levitation is invariably preceded by a state of ecstasy. The question then is, How is it possible for a special state of mind like ecstasy to affect something as physically fundamental as gravity?

Before considering some possibilities, a few very brief remarks about explanation seem in order. To begin with, what sort of explanation of levitation is it reasonable to hope for, given the queer nature of our phenomena? (What could be queerer than

precognition, for instance?) Explanations modeled after the physical sciences with reliable laws and equations for making predictions at this point seem quixotic because the 'force' presumably behind the levitations is not physical in any obvious sense. How is one to go about trying to isolate, measure and manipulate it? This is a force we can only infer from events that occur rarely and unpredictably. Nor does it seem likely or even possible to control for all the variables in the study of something as elusive as levitation. Since the rogue phenomena we hope to explain operate largely through the unconscious, our subject matter is all the more elusive and recalcitrant. Is even a probabilistic account of levitation probable?

Perhaps rare phenomena like levitation are fit best, if not solely, for observational, or historical science. To make matters really difficult for the theoretician, some writers believe the phenomena are *systematically evasive*. From William James to J. E. Kennedy and John Beloff, researchers have voiced their suspicions that there is something actively elusive and systematically confounding about psychical reality.[xvi] Factor in the problem of the well-known experimenter effect, which shows we can never be quite sure about the source or agency of the paranormality in a given test – the subject, the experimenter, the person recording the results, or what? In the case of Joseph, we can wonder, where is the "new force" that William Crookes claimed to have discovered actually coming from? Was it a byproduct of Joseph's group dynamic in the Catholic Church of his day, of the marvelous machinations of the monk's subliminal mind, or of some divine agency's intervention, as believers would have it? An additional problem for the theorist is that these phenomena are affected by changing historical conditions. It is hard to understand Joseph outside the context of his radically repressed, Counter-Reformation form of Baroque mysticism. There is much that is perennial in his mysticism, but the manner of its expression was highly localized and filtered through a particular spasmodic phase of his culture's evolution. I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but I find it hard to ignore the very peculiar nature of our subject matter. On now to some concrete attempts at explanation; there are two components: one psychosocial, the other physical.

Psychosocial – We begin with the peculiar state of mind the records show invariably preceded Joseph's levitations. Clearly, this state holds part of the explanation of Joseph's anomalous behaviors; evident from all the accounts, his dissociated state, "being senseless" and "carried away", led to levitation. Joseph's object was to reach the zero point of resistance to subliminal uprush, and we could say he achieved the critical state by inducing the equivalent of a near-death experience. With all the fasting, sleeplessness, and subjugation of body and ego, the constant one-pointing of his consciousness on otherworldliness, Joseph violently shunts himself out of his body, resulting in the state of *ecstasis*, of "standing outside" of himself.

The crucial state is fostered by the culture. External artifacts, practices, and institutions are designed to suggest and induce certain states of mind. Much in Baroque art, sculpture, and especially architecture, buoyed by dogmas enunciated at the Council of Trent launched in 1575, was designed to enlarge the perception of space, aiming to create sensory atmospheres for inducing flights of the spiritual imagination. Joseph was the incarnation of Heinrich Wölfflin's[xvii] diagonal as the essential indicator of Baroque *space*. Gone is the classical stability of Palladio; the diagonal, which evokes motion, and transforms plastic space. Baroque art range through media deliberately porous and transparent to the transcendent. The social and cultural milieu of Joseph's world

encouraged the exploration of states of consciousness broadly conducive to levitation, a kind of metaphysical dizziness. Joseph, in fact, often used the word *stordimento* – dazed, dizzy, stupefied – to describe his state. He was always apologetic about his absences. Sometimes, he lamented, people suspected he was just a drunkard.

I would posit a generally high degree of *psychical tension* as a feature of Joseph's mental life.[xviii] Thanks to the psychical tension, Joseph's psychophysiology was apparently *disposed* to ecstatic seizure. The higher the psychical tension the more powerful the release – in Joseph's word, the "explosion" -- usually signaled by his pre-levitational orgasmic screams. Joseph's psychological state during levitation seems to fit the "filter" theory of the mind-brain relationship: the view that brains don't create consciousness but are vehicles for transmitting, modulating, and transforming consciousness. In ordinary life, one's brain, as Schopenhauer mockingly observed, is mainly the servant of one's belly and genitals. To free consciousness from the survival-replication obsession, ecstatically oriented people have figured out ways to train, divert, and if possible tame the distractions of their biologically driven existence. These somewhat strange pioneers of human psychophysicality have found that their counter-rational, often anti-life practices, sometimes yield up all manner of psychic and spiritual treasure.

Physical – So we know something about the psychical side of Joseph's levitations. We have a picture of the state of mind associated with his levitation, perhaps how it could be induced experimentally, even explained by the 'filter' theory. But we still have to face the physical problem: we can understand how the mind soars beyond the body, but we don't understand how the body could follow the mind during the ascent.

To account for Joseph's levitations, we need a physics that makes room for a robust causal power of mind.[xix] As it turns out, an interesting minority of physicists does worry about the fallen estate of mind. Henry Stapp, for example, points out that classical physics leaves consciousness completely out of the world-picture. But with the new quantum physics, consciousness comes back to center stage. The physicist has no place to run but is forced to face the mighty dragon of consciousness. As Pico Mirandola said in the Renaissance, what makes us divine is that we can ascend or descend the ladder of evolution: we can choose to raise ourselves aloft or dive into the nethermost dregs of being. So Stapp is intent on explaining the effectiveness of conscious will, so as not to forfeit our role in the cosmogenesis; he does that by appealing to the notion of the quantum Zeno effect. When a conscious being wills an action, the mind acts on certain quantum indeterminacies in the brain and creates a template for the performance of that action. If the quantum Zeno effect amplifies the effect of repeated intention, the massive cohesiveness and concentrated vital force of Joseph's intentions might indeed produce the startling effects of levitation.

Quantum uncertainty is the Trojan horse whereby the mind gets inside the stronghold of matter and learns to dominate it. If the quantum Zeno effect is possible with the brain, it should also be possible in principle with *any* physical object. Stapp makes this point very clearly. If intention can affect the brain, why not any physical object? The power of levitation lies close at hand, within our most ordinary capacity for voluntary intention. If this is a valid connection, then one way to explore the mystery of levitation is to explore the mechanics of our voluntary intelligence. There might also be some practical benefit to this line of inquiry.

In a short, speculative paper titled "Mind-Based Quantum Theory", Stapp discusses three ideas that might shed light on levitation and other paranormal phenomena. One is the quantum Zeno effect just mentioned, which would explain how conscious effort creates templates in the brain that facilitate actions, normal and supernormal. The other two ideas amplify our intuition of the girth and power of mind. The first consists of taking a position that asserts as a first principle – in line with William James – an ontology of mind that *pre-exists* brain. Mind is not an emergent property of complex brains but a reality unto itself; this is the intuition of most mystics and seems spontaneously to have been arrived at in the Upanishads, Anaximander, Plato, and many other Axial age thinkers and prophets. James argued it is logically simpler to assume that mind just is a primary fact of nature rather than go on in the hopeless struggle of trying to extract mind from dead matter. We should begin with "a full ontology, not some piecemeal incremental approach," says Stapp (p.4). In a school of Vedanta that interests the physicist, the fundamental, pure mind that underlies the whole of reality is called the "Supreme Person", renamed by Stapp the Global Mind. This second step follows from positing a mind-based ontology. Our personal minds subsist in a Supreme or Global Mind, extending us mentally to global dimensions. Before we can begin to handle Joseph's flights, another step is necessary. We have expanded our minds but we are still surrounded by a nature that is unalive and unresponsive. Thanks to quantum mechanics, Stapp argues, what we call matter is itself more immaterial than we would guess. "There is no 'matter': nothing that behaves fundamentally like the material stuff of classical mechanics" (p.6). Quantum reality is more mindlike than matterlike. Once we posit this mindlikeness as operative in the deep fabric of nature, it is easier to imagine the occurrence of mind-based paranormal phenomena. If, as Stapp says, "all elements in the ontology can reasonably be construed as mentalistic," mind-generated paranormal effects now become more intelligible and conceivable. The core intuition is that something called Global Mind – Aldous Huxley spoke of Mind at Large – enjoys the capability of "acting in response to the mentations of individual conscious agents" (p.7). In relation to Joseph's levitations, Stapp makes a crucial point, connecting the normal with the supernormal. "But if the physical system that is able to be probed by a conscious individual mind is not restricted to the nervous system of the associated conscious agent, then psychokinesis is no longer a problem" (p.8). Joseph would be somebody whose relentless, erotically charged "probing questions" drastically exploits the quantum malleability of nature. The probing, prolonged and systematic, results in the strange re-fashionings of nature one hears about in the life of Joseph: levitation, the odor of sanctity, healing power, and all the rest.

Stapp also argues that a fundamental quantum uncertainty pervades the whole of physical reality; if Bucke taught us to think about cosmic consciousness, Stapp would have us believe the cosmos *is* conscious – or, at any rate, quasi or proto conscious. The critical advance comes to this: Deep in the fabric of physical being is a germ of connective tissue, finely stretched, whose tendrils reach outward toward us sentient beings. Voluntary intelligence, combined with a certain quantum malleability of micro-nature, makes levitation (and who knows what else) possible.

The notion of higher dimensions provides some interesting hints toward explaining levitation. Before we consider Bernard Carr's ideas, it's important to describe what appears to happen in the space around Joseph during his ecstatic seizures. His

extreme mental states either create, or allow to manifest, a new region of space around him with very peculiar properties. When Joseph in ecstasy lifts off, the normal gravity field around him is disturbed. One observation reported in on the *processi* is telling: in order to confirm their impressions, two witnesses crouched under Joseph while he was levitating several feet above the ground; they noticed that his slipper did not fall off his foot. From that observation it appears that the alteration of gravity extends around the body of Joseph, including objects not attached to his body.

The changed space had other reported properties. He was often observed to float over burning candles, was clearly immune to pain or any normal burning effects. In the levitated zone, Joseph could be poked, pulled, scratched; he felt nothing, being beside himself. One very odd feature of the space: moved about during his levitations, his clothing didn't move or flap but remained "composed". It was as if there was something orchestrating a performance, keeping everything in place, like a costume or a photogenic angle. Another interesting feature of the space around Joseph – very well documented in a separate chapter by Bernini – was the "odor of sanctity". Certain unknown but exquisite odors clung to objects touched or rooms inhabited by Joseph, and lasted for days, months, even years. In sum, the space forming around Joseph during his levitations had various puzzling properties: a curiously pliant gravity; immunity to fire, wind, mechanical pressure; unexplained fragrances; and other strange properties I will not describe here.

The notion of odd spaces with odd properties is no stranger to physics. Carr, along with the American physicist, James Beichler, suggests that concepts of higher dimensions can help us understand paranormality. Carr argues for the need to rethink fundamental concepts of space with an eye to handling memory, telepathy, near-death experiences, mystical states, precognition, and the like. What about Joseph's anomalous space bubble? According to Carr, there are extreme situations when three dimensions of space may be compacted into a two-dimensional spatial reality, without information loss. The notion of compacting different spaces could be applied to Joseph's levitations.

Now it turns out that the properties of Joseph's levitated space are familiar to us from dream space. Gravity, for example, is suspended in a flying dream. Moreover, fire cannot burn us in dream space where objects in general manifest and unfold in a manner free from the normal constraints of objective time and space. In fact, the dream world is like Joseph's world when he is levitating. Joseph's bubble seems made of *surreal* space, that is, in Andre Breton's sense of a reality that fuses unfettered dream and waking worlds.[xx] Levitation is something you might dream -- or see in a Chagall painting -- except that Joseph superposed *his* dream on public waking space. But how is that possible?

Usually, waking life and dream life are two, sharply separate realities, except for the twilight states of falling asleep (hypnogogic) and waking up (hypnopompic). Is there a way of interweaving the two forms of reality, dream and waking, into a higher fabric of spatial existence? Is there perhaps some upper limit of the ecstatic trance that somehow compacts two normally divided states of consciousness, their diverse spaces and properties, into one seamless reality? We might then conjecture that Joseph's "mental excesses" (Bernini's term) caused his waking and his dream space to compact into one transient bubble around him. This compaction model seems at least to explain the observed anomalies.

Also on this point, a lucid dream seems like an example of a *partial* compaction of dream and waking space. In a lucid dream, we find ourselves dreaming but also aware that we are dreaming. This seems like a space partially compacted of dream and waking reality. The lucid dream, however, occurs in dream space and is private. Joseph's compaction of dream and waking occurs in public space. Some overlap and crisscrossing here; one approach to studying levitation might then be experimental lucid dreaming. Another possible (and related) avenue of experimentation would be in the use of automatism in the plastic and sound arts. Carr's discussion of higher spaces invites various forms of the experimentation, not just in scientific psychology but also in the arts.

Joseph's levitations might hinge on the compaction of normally disconnected spaces. It appears *as if* his ecstasies somehow caused periodic compactions of two normally separate dimensions of space. Viewing it that way would explain the perceived anomalies.

Let's look at another angle of approach to theorizing levitation. Wolfgang Pauli, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, shared with C.G. Jung an interest in the mind-body problem. As I said before, ecstasy always precedes levitation. What would this mean for the mind-body problem? For a materialist, Joseph's levitations must seem quite impossible. In fact, Joseph's life was an ongoing display of the power of mind over the normal constraints of matter – most ostentatiously, in his levitations.

In the picture developed by Pauli, Jung, and Atmanspacher, the solution to the mind-body problem is to posit one ultimate reality, archetypally known as the *Unus mundus.* Mind and matter are the "dual aspects" of one underlying unified reality. Unlike reductive materialism, this double-aspect view embraces the physical *and* the psychical, not favoring one or the other, and not denying or obliterating the properties of either. Far from a dry formula, it expresses an intuition of a lost wholeness of being. In our fractured human condition, Eliade would say, we are nostalgic for the Unus Mundus, for the paradisal integrity of existence.

Jung wrote: "That even the psychic world, which is so extraordinarily different from the physical world, does not have its roots outside the one cosmos is evident from the undeniable fact that causal connections exist between the psyche and the body which point to their underlying unitary nature."[xxi] In short, our minds and bodies interact, proving they are connected. In the Unus Mundus, the mental and the physical lie together, says Atmanspacher, "neither identical nor completely separated." The secret to creative power lies in the hidden unity of being; Myers spoke of co-coordinating the supraliminal and subliminal layers of mind, equating the drift toward unity with the nisus of genius.

In a letter, Pauli likens Jung's archetypes to Plato's Ideas, said to be "ordering" principles and "a force of nature." The archetypes of the imagination are forces of nature that "also have to put forth, create, condition anything lawlike in the behavior of the corporeal world." This theoretical description calls to mind Joseph who sought to assimilate himself to the ultimate reality here dubbed Unus Mundus. How can we explain levitation in this context? It is possible to read levitation as an external expression of the unifying power of the Unus Mundus. Levitation becomes possible in light of the double-aspect monism of mind and matter; ecstasy and levitation being two aspects of one unified but transfigured reality. The dramatic form of this patently expressive display speaks to us as a symbol of an invisible order of being.

Levitation, as the reports indicate, impacts the gravitational field around the agent's body. Pauli linked the symmetries of nature to the Unus Mundus; the mind-matter split reflects the broken symmetry of the Unus Mundus. "Physics relies on a mirror symmetry between mind and nature," wrote Pauli.[xxii] In light of that, we could say that levitation is the external face of the psyche in its ecstatic flight toward the One. Joseph's consciousness aspires toward the One World, dragging his body after it; ecstasy somehow brings on the synchronicity of levitation. The flight of the body is an epiphany of the world where mind and matter are, like two lovers, ecstatically one. In the eyes of the world, levitation is ocular proof of overcoming the human condition. As far as I can see, the notion of Unus Mundus restores the physical potency of psyche to the cosmic scheme. Again, we have some leads for grasping Joseph's levitations more readily than the mind-destitute worldview of classical physics.

Another idea of Pauli's may be useful. He expressed doubts about the conceptual foundations of natural selection and was critical of the facile dismissal of final causation. The physicist Helmut Schmidt performed PK experiments in which he identified a kind of final causation at work.[xxiii] Schmidt noticed that what counted in PK success was the ability to focus on the end state or goal to be achieved, not on the rules or linear steps leading to the goal. This seems to reverse normal the order of normal efficient causation; instead of the cause leading to the goal or end-state, you begin with the goal or end-state and then find the cause that gets you there. This sounds like a description of philosophers called teleological causation. It was plain to Schmidt, as it was to Crookes the Victorian physicist that PK differs from the physical forces of inanimate nature.

Joseph's behavior fits Schmidt's model. Joseph is totally focused on uniting with his divine goal, just as the PK agent is focused on the display panel. By definition, PK is achieved through mental means: by symbols, contemplation, intention, identifying with a target, etc. It requires a special kind of skill. Joseph's mechanical, efficient intelligence was comically deficient, but his ability to exclude competing ideas and hold his attention on one thing fixedly was peerless. As such he was a model for effective goal-oriented thinking and therefore for PK, according to Schmidt. Joseph never aimed to levitate; his goal was to abandon himself to the divine love object. The levitations were a byproduct, an epiphenomenon of his intention.

In this sense, we may view the levitations as synchronicities, not causally related in Jung's sense, but generated from the intense meaningfulness of the experience. According to Atmanspacher, Pauli wrote, "that the aspects of meaning and goal-orientedness in synchronicity might force science to revive the historically repressed concept of finality as a complement to causality".[xxiv] Joseph was a master of teleological thinking. If meaning invests archetypes with power, Joseph's levitations are mirror productions of the archetype of Ascension to the Unus Mundus. The archetype of the Unus Mundus has a distinctly mystical flavor, in which levitation would be an effect of the hidden symmetry of mind and matter. The transcendent oneness is broken in ordinary life, but in the super-ordinary life of the Unus Mundus – revealed in the adventures of great mystics -- the hidden union becomes manifest in marvelous ways: i.e., by levitation, odor of sanctity, etc.

Conclusion

I have sketched a few angles of approach to the mystery of levitation. The aim is to elicit more competent attempts at explaining and theorizing this dramatic show of mental power over physical reality. In the Tao of psi, PK is yang, ESP is yin. If the intuition of the Unus Mundus is sound, PK, and especially ecstatic levitation, may spring from the nameless creative source called Tao. Viewed in this way, Joseph's levitations are part of a symbolic display that speaks to the divine spark within us all. I am more certain about the facts of Joseph's levitations than about these expansive forays into explanation. But one thing I feel encouraged to say: If there is something in human consciousness that can impinge on the laws of gravity, it may be part of something that can even survive the grave.

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[i] For the anatomy of worldview-making, see Kluback, W., Weinbaum, M. (1957) *Dilthey's Philosophy of Existence*. New York: Bookman Associates.

[ii] The Roman Church inherits the legalistic tradition of the classical world, and uses it formally to establish the case for or against "miracle" claims. There is no reason to doubt that other traditions have their share of anomalies; what they lack is a method for deposing eyewitness testimony.

[iii] Dingwall, E. (1962) *Some Human Oddities*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books. Pp.9-37.

[iv] Thurston, H. (1952) *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*. London: Burnes Oates.

[v] Pastrovicchi, A. (1 980) *Saint Joseph of Copertino*. Rockford, Il.: Tan Books.

[vi] Braude, S. (1986) *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science.* New York&London: Routledge &Kegan Paul. See especially pp. 193-220.

[vii] See Emily Kelly's chapter 3 (pp. 117-240) in *Irreducible Mind* (2007) Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

[viii] See the classic paper by Thouless, R. H. & Wiesner, B.P. (1948). The psi process in normal and 'paranormal' psychology. *Proceedings for the Society for Psychical Research*, 48 (174). 177-196.

[ix] *Wings of Ecstasy: A Study of the Mind-Body Problem*, Michael Grosso; *The Life of Joseph of Copertino* by Domenico Bernini (1722). Translated by Cynthia Clough; edited and abridged by Michael Grosso……

[x] Lambertini was an Enlightenment pope, rational and mild-tempered, a friend of Voltaire and the new science. See Renée Haynes (1970) *The Philosopher King*: *The Humanist Pope: Benedict XIV*. LondonLWedenfeld & Nicolson.

[xi] I was told by a referee of a paper on Joseph that I should not rule out the mass conspiracy hypothesis as *ludicrous*. I do.

[xii] See Chabris, C. & Daniel Simons (2010) *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us*. Crown: New York.

[xiii] Braude, S. Ibid.

[xiv] Eisenbud, J. (1982) The flight that failed. *The Christian Parapsychologist*. London. V. 4; N. 7, p. 217.

[xv] Whitehead, A.N. (1962) *Modes of Thought*. New York: Capricorn. See Chapter 7, 'Nature Lifeless.'.
[xvi] See especially Kennedy, J.E. (2004) What is the purpose ofpsi? *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, V.98, pp.1-27.
[xvii] Wölfflin, H. (1929) *Principles of Art History*. Dover Publications.
[xviii] For a discussion of the creative significance of 'holding psychical tension" in the life of Francis of Assisi, from a Jungian point of view, see Haule, *The Ecstasies of Saint Francis* (2004) Great Barington, MA: Lindisfarne Books.
[xix] See Rosenblum, B & Kuttner, F. (2006) Quantum Enigma: *Physics Encounters Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
[xx] Breton, A. (1972) *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Ann Arbor Paperback.
[xxi] AP, p.18.
[xxii] A.&P. P.20
[xxiii] Schmidt, H. (1974) Psychokinesis, in *Psychic Exploration: A Challenge for Science*.New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 179-174.
[xxiv] A.&P., p.20.